

Barth Society met in Atlanta November 20-22, 2015

Our meeting in Atlanta in conjunction with the AAR featured a Friday afternoon session from 3:30 P.M. to 6:00 P.M. and a Saturday morning session from 9:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. The presenters for the Friday afternoon session were JinHyok Kim, Torch Trinity Graduate University, Seoul, S. Korea, whose lecture was entitled: “*Karl Barth’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*” and Andrea C. White, Union Theological Seminary, New York City, whose lecture was entitled: “*The Political Theology of Karl Barth: Why a Womanist Theologian Should Care.*” George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary presided. The Saturday morning session featured an exchange between Kevin Diller and D. Paul La Montagne with regard to their recent books on Barth: *Barth and Rationality: Critical Realism in Theology* (Wipf and Stock, 2012) by D. Paul La Montagne and *Theology’s Epistemological Dilemma: How Karl Barth and Alvin Plantinga Provide a Unified Response* (IVP, 2014) by Kevin Diller. Kevin Diller, Taylor University, Upland, Indiana presented a paper discussing D. Paul La Montagne’s book entitled “*Barth and Rationality according to D. Paul La Montagne*” and D. Paul La Montagne, Presbytery of New Brunswick, New Jersey presented a paper discussing Kevin Diller’s book entitled “*Theology’s Epistemological Dilemma according to Kevin Diller.*” Garrett Green, Connecticut College and George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary presided. In addition to these sessions, the Karl Barth Society of North America featured a Sunday morning session from 9:00 A.M. to 11:30 A.M. The theme of this session was: *Theological Theology—Engagements with the Work of John Webster.* A distinguished panel discussed various aspects of John Webster’s theology which advocates a more theological theology, that is, a theology that focuses on its own unique subject, God and all things in relation to God, and allows its methods to bear witness to these realities. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois presented a paper entitled ““*Exegesis I know, and Theology I know, but who are you?*” *Acts 19 and the Theological Interpretation of Scripture;*” Katherine Sonderegger, Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Virginia, presented a paper entitled “*The Sinlessness of Christ;*” Lewis Ayres, Durham University, UK presented a paper entitled “*The Word Answering the Word: Opening the Space of Catholic Biblical Interpretation;*” and Francis Watson, Durham University, Durham, UK presented a paper entitled “*Does Historical Criticism Exist? A Contribution to Debate on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture.*” Darren Sarisky, Oxford University, UK presented John Webster’s response. R. David Nelson, Baker Academic & Brazos Press presided. These papers, along with nineteen others, can be read in *Theological Theology: Essays in Honour of John Webster*, ed. R. David Nelson, Darren Sarisky and Justin Stratis, (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015).

The Eleventh Annual Barth Conference will be held at Princeton Theological Seminary June 19-22, 2016. This Conference is entitled: “Karl Barth’s Pneumatology and the Global Pentecostal Movement” and is co-sponsored by *The Center for Barth Studies at Princeton Theological Seminary* and the *Karl Barth Society of North America*.

For full Details and Registration, the Conference website is: <http://www.ptsem.edu/barthconference/>

Directly following last year's Annual Barth Conference, the Center for Barth Studies hosted the first **Karl Barth Pastor's Conference** at **Princeton Theological Seminary**, June 24-26, 2015

Coverage of the Pastor's Conference Provided by

Sara Misgen of **Princeton Theological Seminary**

Approximately 140 people attended for three days of plenary lectures and workshops focused on the theme of "Karl Barth & the Mission of the Church."

The conference opened on Wednesday night with remarks from M. Craig Barnes, President of Princeton Theological Seminary, and Kaitlyn Dugan, Managing Director of the Center for Barth Studies. The Rev. Dr. William Willimon, Professor at Duke Divinity School, opened the conference with a plenary lecture entitled "How Karl Barth Taught me to Preach." This was followed by a reception in Mackay campus center.

Thursday began with breakfast on-campus and worship in Miller Chapel. President Barnes preached on Jonah 1 and 3.

Participants then split into groups for the first of four workshop sessions. The workshops were designed to facilitate engagement with Barth's theology in ways that were practical and relevant to pastoral ministry in the twenty-first century. Participants were given a choice as to the sessions they wanted to participate in, selecting from the following list:

- "Mission as Antagonistic of the Political: Karl Barth, the Lordless Powers, and the Church Among 'the Undercommons,'" led by Ry Siggelkow of Princeton Theological Seminary. This workshop centered on applying Barth's theology of mission in *CD IV* in a post-colonial twenty-first century context.
- "Preaching God as the Author of the Story," led by Rev. Fleming Rutledge who focused on four principle emphases of preaching, in conversation with Barth's theology, to help preachers reconsider the fundamentals of their approaches.
- "Preparing for the Gathering, Upbuilding, and Sending of the Christian Community: Barth's

Theological Understanding of the Church Shapes the Pastor's Practical Approach to Preaching" led by Christian Andrews of Park Church in Tinton Falls, NJ. The impact of Karl Barth's ecclesiology on the preacher's identity, aims, and methods was explored.

- "The Church Confesses: Ethics in the Work of Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer" led by Dr. Nancy Duff of Princeton Theological Seminary helped participants to consider (1) the resistance of Barth and Bonhoeffer to the Nazis, and (2) how their theologies might inform the church's responsible action today.
- "The Revolutionary Spirit of the Red Pastor of Safenwil: Karl Barth's Prophetic Witness as an inspiration for Faith-Rooted Organizing Today," led by Rev. Dr. Peter Heltzel of New York Theological Seminary. This workshop explored the faith-rooted organizing efforts of Barth in 1915 Safenwil along with the writing of the Barmen declaration, and used them to consider how churches can work together for social change.
- "Preaching with Barth," led by Rev. Dr. William Willimon who examined Barth's style of preaching as a way of inspiring contemporary preachers.

After a break for lunch in Mackay center, participants attended two additional workshops, choosing again from the above list. That evening, a conference banquet was held in Mackay center, followed by a plenary lecture from Dr. Willie Jennings, now of Yale University. Dr. Jennings' lecture was entitled "What Karl Barth Taught Me about Faith, Hope, and Love," and focused on how Barth's discussions of the theological virtues can inspire modern pastoral ministry.

Friday morning opened with breakfast followed by the final round of workshops. Rev. Debbie Blue, of House of Mercy Church in St. Paul, Minnesota, gave a closing plenary entitled “No one is Not Religious: Witnessing to What is Beyond Belief (Barth’s ever relevant ir(reverence).” Rev. Blue offered an autobiographical account of how Barth has shaped her ministry and spiritual journey. The conference closed with worship in Miller Chapel, with the Rev. Dr. Kara Slade, Ph.D. Student at Duke University and Vicar of St. David’s Episcopal Church in Larinburg, North Carolina, preaching on Exodus 32. Participants gave strong feedback, stating that they enjoyed the conference and hope to attend more in the future. Plans for a second Pastor’s Conference at Princeton Theological Seminary in 2017 are under way.

What follows are summaries of the lectures from the KBSNA meeting in Atlanta

Karl Barth’s Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

JinHyok (Jin) Kim
Torch Trinity Graduate University, S. Korea

JinHyok Kim’s lecture began by asking whether or not the idea that Barth’s doctrine of the Spirit was “binitarian” was a myth. He believed it was. And to open a discussion of the Spirit in Barth’s theology Kim offered a statement from Barth documented in *Karl Barth’s Table Talk*, recorded and ed. John Godsey [Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1962]: “Today I would speak more of the Holy Spirit. Perhaps I was too cautious. You students should not make that mistake in your polemical writings . . . ! A good theology can be based on any of the three articles of the Creed. You could base it on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit . . . I personally think that a theology of the Holy Spirit might be all right after AD 2000, but now we are still too close to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries” (27-8).

Kim discussed the fact that Barth has been criticized for leaving little room for the Spirit and that to some theologians, such as Robert Jenson, his position seemed binitarian. Although Barth never lived to write *Church Dogmatics V* on Redemption, Kim proposed that Barth’s theology should be studied in light of redemption, noting that Romans 8 played a vital role in Barth’s thinking.

Next, Kim explained that for Barth there was no independent doctrine of the Spirit since all the works of the Trinity *ad extra* are one. The Spirit creates human freedom for God and that is a miracle no less than the miracle of Jesus’ birth from the Virgin Mary or even creation itself. Barth’s earlier work gives clues concerning his view of redemption. The young Barth argued that redemption must be seen eschatologically since the Spirit is the Spirit of promise. The Spirit unveils in the penultimate world our becoming God’s children. Since reconciliation took place without qualification, there could be no possibility of sin and death in redemption, which is the telos of creation. This future reality structures our present existence. This is the promise of the Spirit. And this motivates us to look beyond the present to the coming kingdom, while it sheds light on the present as we move into the future of God. Our present being is in becoming by God’s redemptive grace. In light of the incarnation and the resurrection, there is fellowship between us and God. God gives us a share in his own nature. But grace is victorious over our sins inasmuch as we are children of God and God is thus our redeemer.

In the Spirit we are free to respond and live as God’s children. How can we know what God wants of us without knowing what God wants for us? Living our provisional entangled lives will make sense in the end by God’s future. We should reflect on history. But the Christian life consists in actually living in the Spirit in terms of hope—and that means it is an act with the Spirit looking forward rather than looking backward. It means waiting for God’s redemption and hastening toward it in the Spirit. For the mature Barth, the Holy Spirit was conceptualized as the Spirit of the Son, through whom human beings can participate in the Son and inherit the Son’s glory. The Spirit’s eschatological acts consist in the Father’s relationship with his children. This redemptive theme recurred in the later Barth.

Kim explained that Barth’s view of the Spirit was centered on Romans 8 which enabled him to think of redemption as more than reconciliation. In 1922 Barth explained his theology to a group of ministers simply referring to the Spirit’s “sigh” referred to in Romans 8. This became a crucial theme in his view of redemption. The Spirit’s prayer in and through our “sigh” allows us to converse with the unknown Father, according to Kim. The “sigh” colors the life of prayer with an eschatological tone. Barth did not think of prayer as a purely human activity since for him it was rooted in the Spirit’s eschatological adoption of the person praying as God’s own child. Come Holy Spirit—that is Barth’s theology. Divine agency is the Spirit of Sonship. Prayer and participation are

therefore important for Barth. The triune God not only passively hears prayer, but also actively creates its conditions and its possibility by becoming the primary praying agent. The Spirit's redemptive act is the act of enabling prayer. This allows us to truly converse with God. If God were not there, there would have been no cause for groaning. But God has indeed troubled us with restlessness. He causes our groaning. God takes over our ineptness. Barth saw prayer as possible only in the Spirit. Barth laid the foundation for this in the second edition of Romans noting that the justification for our prayer is not that we have attained some higher eminence on the ladder of prayer, since all such ladders "are erected within the sphere of the 'No-God' of this world." Rather, "the justification of our prayer and the reality of our communion with God are grounded upon the truth that Another, the Eternal, the Second Man from Heaven (1 Cor. xv.47), stands before God pre-eminent in power and—in our place" (Barth, Romans II, 317). The triune God therefore not only hears prayer but prompts and enables it. Prayer and piety take place on the basis of God's own prayer. Kim noted that Romans 7 provides a key existential background for Romans 8. The Spirit endows us in prayer by being thrown into the intra divine prayer—prayer takes place in God! The Father/child relation is created by the Spirit and given to us in prayer. Pneumatic prayer is thus the center of Barth's idea of redemption.

The desperate cry of human prayer is analogous to Gethsemane. From above to below the Spirit purifies and takes prayer into the fellowship of the trinity. The unity of God and humanity is seen positively in light of prayer. Prayer for Barth is the *Sitz im Leben* of the cooperation between God and God's children.

Having said all of this, Kim concluded that Barth's view of the Holy Spirit, as seen in the perspective of redemption, illustrates clearly that Barth loves the Spirit too much to be binitarian.

The Political Theology of Karl Barth: Why a Womanist Theologian Should Care

Andrea C. White
Union Theological Seminary, New York City

In a keynote talk on death a few years ago Andrea White noted that she made a remark about her intellectual affinities for Barth and Womanist theology

suggesting that she might be a Womanist Barthian. This led her to think that perhaps there is a worthy conversation to be had on this issue.

From there she went on to say that the Christian community's existence is political—not as an eternal church but in the *polis* built by God coming down from heaven to earth. The Christian community is of possible political significance since problems harassing the state also harass the church. Of course God is not revealed by any political community as such. And the state cannot become the kingdom of God, since it is an independent reality. Still, the church has no privileged access to God. And an indifferent non-political Christian community is not a possibility. The Church therefore has its share in political responsibility.

The Church functions in relation to the state by placing humanity at the center; it ought to be interested in human beings and not in abstract causes. Referring to her classes, White noted that the answer to almost any question in her classes is either Jesus Christ or dialectic. Since God became human, the human is the measure of all things, especially over every mere cause. In other words, humans don't serve causes; causes serve humans. From this White concluded that the Church must stand for social justice in the human sphere. Thus, the greatest measure of social justice will always drive the agenda of Christians. It is a bad sign, she said, when Christians are frightened by political sermons, as if they could not be political. The Church must see that it does not make a habit of coming on the scene too late. This would prevent the Church from exerting influence.

As this concerns Womanist theology, White concluded that this analysis is off to a good start. But, she noted that the relevance of these comments is only superficial. At this point she referred to Barth who was called "The Red Pastor" to stress that political implications are persistent in Karl Barth's writings. She also noted that claims about his political theology can be found where he does not mention them specifically.

What about race and gender as theological problems? According to White, Barth offers no thoroughgoing treatment of race or gender. Barth is not a liberation theologian, although scholars have placed Barth in conversation with liberation theology. George Hunsinger argues that the theological and political are intimately related in Barth. At that point White decided to consider some of Barth's possible shortcomings such as his idea of God as *Totaliter aliter* and his view of nothingness. Barth is most

open to critique on these ideas she suggested. Then she mentioned that the main reasons why people hate Karl Barth are his emphasis on transcendence; the idea that his thinking is ahistorical; and the idea that he doesn't take sin seriously enough or at all. But, she noted that Barth is a revolutionary and his theology critiques ideology. It is a political theology.

Ethics is a great disturbance. Faith is the miracle. Faith is a divine gift and not a human achievement. Faith is void of human content. Barth's theology defies any kind of system. Revolutionary theology is not transcendental because it focuses on a concrete world and not one beyond or behind our world. We live a concrete life within the world and not in some ideal world. There are no definitive proclamations for theology. We can only speak of the knowledge of God again and again. White noted that Barth's theology is political through and through—it is and remains a critical theology. It remains attuned to the questioning heart of faith. Barth's critique of ideology is aware of the dangers of religion and thus stresses that theology is provisional. According to White, theology for Barth, is talk about God in spite of its inability to do so. God is not directly communicated or apprehended. Direct knowledge is only knowledge of an idol. Consequently, the significance of religions is indirect. Its content is received only in contradiction. Faith is both sacred and profane together. Human persons may become religious persons. Religion is the ability to receive an impress of revelation—but this stands in the shadow of sin and death. Worship of God is held under suspicion by God and human persons! Maybe in religion humans reach the pinnacle of human achievement. But, these break into pieces on the impossibility of God. Before God no flesh is righteous. What is possible for us must be dissolved by God's no in order to hear God's yes. Religion must be understood negatively. The question of God therefore must always originate and proceed from God. Barth's poem on the sacrifice of religion could thus be characterized as an ideology critique. It is theologically based. *Totaliter aliter* is rejected by womanist theologians. But in his rejecting the *analogia entis*, this thinking allows for intimate relation rather than possession or competition. The *Totaliter aliter* preserves human freedom and dignity because it leads Barth to stress that human persons are not absorbed into the divine. Following the thinking of Kathryn Tanner, she noted that divinity and humanity are not defined over against each other. God has been concerned with the world from the beginning and the incarnation demonstrates this.

What about the charge that his theology is a-historical? What about his theology of history? The

autonomy of revelation seems to lead to this idea. This was not a novel idea; rather it came from Schleiermacher. According to White, Barth is better read as a 19th century theologian. Barth was tackling the problem of epistemological access to God. God must make "Godself" intuitable. In reality, White noted that Barth's theology is not a-historical but instead preserves divine inscrutability. With respect to the resurrection, she noted that, this has no extension in history; it is unintuitable in itself. But it is in fact revealed through history. Divine reality is nothing more than a postulated idea. Barth's theology of history does not occur, she maintained, until he turns to incarnation. The Christ-event cannot be anticipated before the fact precisely because it is an unexpected miracle. In light of this, we find a robust view of history in Barth. From here, she went on to ask how we might view black women's experience in light of Womanist theological concerns. Womanist concerns initially contended with atonement theory. Womanist theologians rejected theologies of the cross that seemed to subject women. Black women were striving for survival more than liberation. What is really at stake, White said, is a doctrine of providence. And Barth's theology of history demonstrates the historical reality of revelation and preserves its autonomy.

White noted that Barth's thinking could be illustrated by relating it to Feuerbach. If Feuerbach represented robust humanism, then Barth's rejection was anti-human. Instead, there is a complex anthropology. Feuerbach saw theology better than theology saw itself. He wanted to change candidates for the other world into students of this world. Nineteenth century theology has long since become anthropology. Feuerbach simply illuminates our own apotheosis. Feuerbach seems to have seen Adam and Eve in their nakedness. Feuerbach critiqued the church. White noted that Barth dismissed Feuerbach because his theory was sheer platitude. Barth's final accusation against Feuerbach does not concern religion. He agreed that humans have been deemed the epitome. But Barth contended that Feuerbach was shallow because he was a non-knower of death and a misknower of evil. This was Feuerbach's real weakness, according to White. God has rejected evil. Nothingness brings death to creatures and to God on the cross. But what defeated it? Barth's anthropology, White contended, was derived from Christology and this is what makes his view stick: the divine act is the basis for being human. Being in encounter is not derived from natural theology. The human person is relational because of the act of God in Christ who stands in relation. In Christ God's affirmation of humanity is revealed. Such a view

could actually strengthen a Womanist position rather than undercut it.

In light of what has been said, White concluded that Barth's theology is a theology of revolution. It is a scandal to modern thought and in light of it, transcendence becomes the possibility for human relations. In Barth's thinking, God wills to be entangled with us in history. Barth turns out to be more humanist than Feuerbach because he respects the problems of sin and death. God in history is willing to risk entanglements in history. In light of this approach, it can be seen why the church should not come on the scene too late.

The **Saturday morning** session featured presentations by **Kevin Diller** and **D. Paul La Montagne** on each other's recent books on Barth.

"Barth and Rationality according to D. Paul La Montagne"

Kevin Diller, Taylor University, Indiana

Kevin Diller began the discussion by mentioning his admiration for Karl Barth's theology. He then described Paul La Montagne's book as phenomenal and impressively good. He noted that it was a serious accomplishment and recommended that we should read it. The book, Diller said, offered clarity without compromise in its presentation of Barth's theology. La Montagne demonstrated his expertise in critical realism in the philosophy of science. La Montagne's conclusion is that with respect to knowledge of God, there are structural similarities with philosophy of science. But Barth's dialectical realism is a response to the revelation of God in Christ and thus is different. Barth's dialectic is the key: God is understood as the active agent in knowing God. We do not have epistemic powers to know God as we have in knowing the world. Diller noted ten points of similarity.

Critical realism results from a doctrine of grace in theology. This clarifies other questions that are raised against Barth. His thinking is neither post-modern nor neo-orthodox. Diller further noted that some critics such as Pannenberg (who accused Barth of faith subjectivism) are tackled with respect to their understanding of God. Diller then noted that there were areas where they disagreed in spite of their wide agreement. Diller indicated that he was uncomfortable with some difficult statements about

mathematics saying that he found that there was some difficulty inherent in attempts to critique human language and logic while using these. He then raised this question: How can we hold strong theological convictions given the fallibility of human language and knowledge? In light of La Montagne's thesis, he will push back by raising the question of whether or not western logic is scrambling to catch up with eastern insights. Jainism, for instance, offers a view of change and permanence that imposes radical limits on human knowledge. Within this perspective, no assertion can be taken as absolute. Reality exists. But is not single natured; it is pluriform. Jainism, Diller noted, is regarded as atheistic. He went on to say that our difficulty in knowing the other (transcendent) does not stem from the nature of the transcendent or from our fallibility. Turning to Barth, Diller noted that he pronounced a definite yes to the knowability of the Word of God. Is Barth commending the relativity of Jainism? Diller concluded that Barth never intended to operate with a doctrine of tentative assertions.

Diller maintained that he and La Montagne also agree a lot. For Barth the impetus for knowledge of God is Christ. Thus, to be critically realist means to be both realist and critical. The first feature of being a realist is commitment to metaphysical realism. This means that the knowing subject can have real knowledge of the world. Diller agreed with this. Speaking of God as an object is an indication of theological realism and not naïve realism. Barth's theology is critical in that knowledge is mediated; it is not identical with the known. Critical theory suggests that God really reveals himself, but is not identical with human words and concepts. Critical and realistic therefore go together. According to Diller, he and La Montagne disagree concerning their attitudes towards foundations and epistemology.

Diller noted that La Montagne was critical of foundationalism. Diller says that his is a qualified foundationalism and that classical foundationalism failed to be critically realistic. Foundationalism refers to the fact that the foundation is in justification for knowledge. La Montagne finds it somewhere else. Diller said that while they both are in favor of critical realism, he still wanted a foundationalism for epistemology because, according to Diller, all knowledge and justified belief rest on non-inferential knowledge for what is believed. La Montagne defines foundationalism as justifying principles that are certain and necessary for justifying epistemic claims.

Most of their disagreement, according to Diller, concerned semantics. Diller said that Barth's epistemology is theologically foundational. He maintained

that a belief system is inferential and that means that the foundation that undergirds foundational beliefs must be seen as a free act of God in revelation. Knowledge exists in our minds but not as us modeling reality. Analytic theology treats knowledge as atomized and impersonal. The foundation for Barth is God himself speaking to us. And human knowledge involves believing. Knowledge is a relation rather than an entity. Diller therefore argued that non-foundationalism advanced some sort of groundlessness. Diller claimed that we need strong gracious interaction with God to have certain knowledge and held that the basis of Barth's theology was entirely dependent on revelation.

Their second area of disagreement concerned Barth's recognition of the personal and transformative character of knowledge of God. Diller wants to emphasize this. But he does not want a doctrine of tentative conviction. He claimed that Barth wants clear and certain knowledge similar to God's own knowledge of himself.

Human knowledge is both personal and transformative. Revelation requires personal transformation. Reconciliation is the truth of God himself who grants himself to us in his revelation. Revelation is reconciliation. Knowledge of God is rational and propositional, but there is the danger that it can be reduced to these. For Barth, we participate in the Son's knowledge of the Father through the Spirit. We must take into account the fact of our fallenness, the need for obedience and repentance. Conversion or transformation of the whole person is required to know God. For Barth, theology is not the knowledge of God; it explores the gift of that knowledge. Genuine knowledge is arrived at by the miracle of God's revelation. Diller claimed that La Montagne says that knowledge of the world is mediated and is thus not directly identical with any object in the world. He then noted that critical realism sees knowledge as an achievement of the mind rather than a gift given and in that regard differed from Barth. For Barth, knowledge is a gift given to the person. Referential knowledge of God therefore needs clarification and qualification. It seems to confuse knowledge and reference. Our formulations are distinct from the knowledge of God because sovereign free grace is clearly distinct from our knowledge.

Diller claimed that the tentative assertion in Jainism concerned whether or not our assertions always must be prefaced with a "perhaps". He then said that commitment is not to our speaking about God but God's commitment to us. Hence, God can be known only by God. We are utterly dependent on God, and

in knowing God we are in a position only of pure gratitude since grace holds us in that knowing.

"Theology's Epistemological Dilemma according to Kevin Diller"

D. Paul La Montagne, Presbytery of New Brunswick, New Jersey

La Montagne began by noting that Kevin's book is a good solid piece of work and can be seen as complementary to his book. Barth admits that no one does theology without philosophical presuppositions: theologians, however, must stand under the same risk: our philosophy may be forced to change in order to submit to the Word of God. There are dialectical reservations since no theologian is identical to the Word of God. Dialectic refers to apparent contradictions. We hope that God will bless such work. Barth's theology can be examined with a variety of epistemological tools. Barth offered a more classic view of Kant. According to La Montagne, Diller's explications are clear, accurate and helpful. He did not make mistakes and let Barth speak for himself. La Montagne noted that Diller's descriptions of Barth's theology are some of the best brief descriptions of Barth's theology he has seen, even though there are problems, especially with regard to natural theology.

La Montagne then offered a brief synopsis of Diller's book. He started by asking: Why is there an epistemological dilemma? We all accept that God can only be known by God. Why then is there a dilemma? The dilemma arises because revelation is cognitive, personal and transformative. Theology requires a cognitive response to revelation. This cognition takes place in the environment of ordinary human cognition. Since revelation must engage our entire selves, it cannot simply be equated with true belief, but must transform us entirely. The question therefore is: Are Diller and La Montagne working with the same epistemological presuppositions. According to La Montagne, they are complementary. Diller on Plantinga deals with warrants for knowledge of God and not merely with true belief. And the dilemma that arises is that if revelation is cognitive, personal and transformative, then knowledge of God is given to us. What is unique is the source and object of that knowledge. We must hold that we really know God in revelation through our knowing, by obeying God himself. We have knowledge of God but we do not have it in that knowledge; we have it only in God. Diller's proposal is not to submit knowledge of God to some philosophical presuppositions. The point is that

we ought to speak of God but cannot and thus give God the glory. Barth uses philosophy and does not dismiss it. This of course raises questions concerning theology and reasons for thinking theologically as well as natural theology; about the nature and character of genuine knowledge focused on faith; and about the authority of Scripture.

After stressing that Diller did a good job presenting Barth, La Montagne asked what basis is given for knowing God? He argued that there is no basis in our knowing since the reality of revelation comes before its possibility. He begins assuming there is real knowledge and that epistemology is second order reflection on that knowledge. Diller, La Montagne said, can be trusted. Theological foundationalism relates to La Montagne's post-foundationalism.

Next, La Montagne discussed warrants and Plantinga. He said this was a difficult notion. A warrant is a normative quantity that distinguishes knowledge from just true belief. The key question concerns the connection between belief and truth. The essence of Plantinga's epistemology, according to La Montagne, is shaped by revelation, which is the source of the warrant or the warrant itself. Plantinga stressed that one cannot assume that he is asking for a warrant for revelation, since he is really arguing that it is wrong to build Christian beliefs on deductive grounds. This could be compatible with Barth's doctrine of revelation. Plantinga's account starts from revelation with the presumption of truth that is communicated. It then finds the warrant in revelation. Revelation is the source of "most of its elements."

La Montagne then discussed three concerns: 1) He accepts the fact that revelation is the warrant and that this makes it possible to coordinate Barth and Plantinga. His concern, however, is that Plantinga's epistemology points to the divine design. This leads to the problematic notion that if belief is true, then there are special cognitive faculties to impart divine information. The question is: Are there such special cognitive faculties? If we think there are, then we might think this design could lead to a knowledge of revelation and that is in reality natural theology.

2) Plantinga admits our incapacity for knowledge of God. There is the problem of sin and our need for the Spirit. The inherent incapacity on the part of creatures for the creator is not fully respected. Perhaps our natural capacity might be sufficient once it is healed; that would not be a problem. Even without the fall there might have been an incarnation.

3) La Montagne said he is very concerned with the *sensus divinitatis* because of the danger of natural theology. This notion, according to La Montagne is entirely unnecessary. It underestimates how radical Barth's doctrine of revelation is. It is a miracle. Therefore, there are no special faculties that are needed. Grace is grace to sinners who nonetheless are enabled by God to know God.

Diller's unified proposal then is that Plantinga and Barth both have a critical realist position. His proposal is to clarify how theologians ought to think about theological knowledge. He believes that we confess that fallible humans really have knowledge of God and that such knowledge of God is a gift of grace. He thus advocates a theological foundationalism which supports the idea that God creates and enables our capacity. La Montagne proposed to offer one example, namely, natural theology as the place where it is possible to test Diller's thesis. La Montagne noted that the two views are not immediately compatible. Accepting them means doing natural theology; but not in Barth's sense. Plantinga rejects natural theology as the attempt to prove the existence of God. Plantinga thus attacks natural theology for belief in God since the warrant for belief is revelation. Diller's question then concerns whether or not there is some supplementary role for natural theology. According to him, Plantinga thinks there is, while Barth would say there is no such role for natural theology. Even though there can be no other source of knowledge of God than revelation, Diller wonders if it is possible that a supplemental natural theology could work as given by grace and revelation? Then, it would be a source for knowledge of God that would not reject revelation. Accordingly, maybe Plantinga's limited use is acceptable. One might then speak of a negative and positive natural theology. And this might have a pastoral and apologetic use.

Within this perspective, it appears that revelation can benefit from the help of natural theology. It can be tolerated as a kind of negative apologetics. Plantinga shows that one can be faithful to revelation (Barth), while using negative apologetics. It is suggested that for the believer in doubt, arguments may neutralize that doubt. In this perspective, natural theology might strengthen belief or relieve doubt. It can serve the warrant for knowledge of God. In this view, one might claim that there are harmonic rational reverberations of faith. Concerning this proposal La Montagne has some serious questions. He maintained that letting natural theology in the room, even in a supplemental way, could make it a condition to determine whether or not we are relying on God. And then that would in reality be a source for knowing God other than

revelation. La Montagne argued that natural theology cannot be allowed to have this position because it is too dangerous. Natural theology tends to support error even when it works. And it transfers trust to the argument and away from God. That is why Barth maintained that there can be no other source for knowledge of God than revelation. Affirmed and reconstituted on a higher plane, trust in God takes the form of knowledge. A model of what is known comes into interaction with all other knowledge in the mind. This is faith producing understanding. Arguments may be used by God to help us know the truth better. But the arguments are only part of the veil God is using to unveil himself. They are part of the witness to revelation. Such thinking is no longer natural theology, but evangelical theology. Something like this is what Diller intends and Plantinga could intend if Diller were to engage him in conversation along these lines. Then, revelation is first and using reason could be seen as the harmonic reverberation of faith.

The **Sunday morning** session offered three presentations on aspects of **John Webster's theology** along with an introduction by **R. David Nelson**.

R. David Nelson, Baker Academic & Brazos Press began the session noting that John Webster borrowed the phrase "theological theology" from Jüngel's landmark book, *God as the Mystery of the World* and first spoke about such theology during his inaugural lecture as Lady Margaret Professor at Oxford in 1997.

Webster argued that Christian theology does its best work when it breaks free from a scientific approach in the sense that science must be qualified at the "bar of reason" and redefines science to mean that it proceeds by way of orientation to "its unique subject", namely, the risen Lord who addresses himself to us and reveals himself to us. According to Nelson, Webster advanced beyond Jüngel, focusing on the role of texts in theology. For Webster a "theological theology" is one that is ever faithful to the God of Christian revelation in all its dogmatic reflections.

Nelson noted that many of his contributions are in this area of inquiry. He mentioned that Webster's work is now developing as he prepares his prolegomena to his *Systematic Theology* which will advance his view of "theological theology" in new directions. Nelson said that Webster's recent discovery of Thomas Aquinas as a key literary mentor will no doubt contribute to his Systematics. Nelson concluded his introductory

remarks with some comments from John Webster's 2008 book on biblical reasoning which he suggested summarizes the ethos of theological theology. His point was that exegesis helps the church participate in the mortification of reason to participate in God. This is ordered to vivification. Christian theology, Nelson said, cannot be content with the idea that reason is not much more than a play of power, since it is oriented to the divine Word as it functions within the "sphere of grace."

"Exegesis I know, and Theology I know, but who are you?"

Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL

Vanhoozer began by noting that theological interpretation of Scripture should involve a return of biblical theologians to a theological reading of Scripture, although this may be an exception to his rule. Theology *is* biblical interpretation lost in wonder and praise and love. We want to obey and praise God. What does this mean, he asked?

Some think it is acceptable to read Scripture on their own terms. That would be acceptable if it were simply the projection of a particular view. What would John Webster do? He would say it is interpretation characterized by a theological description of the nature, purpose, order and reception of the biblical texts and their readers. It proceeds from the nature and purpose of Scripture.

Vanhoozer discussed the challenge involved in identifying marks that make scriptural interpretation theological. He discussed the example in Acts 19 of people who were taking Paul's clothing to cure and cast out evil spirits. A number of believers in Ephesus admitted that they had been involved in magic which, Vanhoozer noted, is the attempt to manipulate the deity. One would recite secret names and words that supposedly had power. We too have sophisticated procedures for exegesis. One might say that hermeneutics is a science; some might invoke the triune name of God as a "quasi-magical formula that resolves interpretive disagreement" in order to solve a difficulty. People might think of the magic power knowledge. This is exactly what we do not want. Historical studies, Vanhoozer emphasized, are the servant of exegesis, not its master. For Vanhoozer, Scripture is discourse fixed by writing in which

someone says something to someone for a purpose. Theological interpretation concerns whose discourse this is. Vanhoozer said he is the exegete's best friend. He intends to resist the idea that an exegetical commentator is more theological than theologians. Vanhoozer stressed that a text is not a Thou or an it, but a medium of communicative action as a way persons extend themselves to others. God, he said, is the holy author. We lack the power to conjure the Word of God. Neither magic nor method can conjure up the Word. We need to humbly submit to God to hear the Word, to have that power.

Analyzing Acts 19:1-7, which recounts Paul's encounter with John the Baptist's disciples who said they never heard of the Holy Spirit when Paul asked them if they had received the Holy Spirit, Vanhoozer noted that Käsemann thinks these disciples represent an immature form of Christianity. They resemble biblical interpreters who miss something of theological importance. He noted that Webster thinks so as well. Vanhoozer maintained that the fruits of Scripture scholars are not negligible and may offer preparation for hearing the Word. Still, that is not yet fully Christian interpretation. These disciples were apparently ignorant of the resurrection and of Pentecost. For Vanhoozer a theological interpretation of Scripture inserts us and our situation into the drama of redemption; we must acknowledge that we are dealing with a text and a context that are our own. He went on to consider how we can properly do justice to Scripture in its original context noting that the New Testament authors did not change the text when they read it in light of Christ. We are dealing with discourse. Whose discourse is it? Who is speaking about what and to whom! A theological interpretation of Scripture, Vanhoozer stressed, seeks the plain sense of the author while also insisting that the inspired human authors sometimes say more than they themselves can know. Hence, he mentioned that the authors of the Old Testament were not always aware of the ultimate "referent" of their writing as indicated in 1 Peter 1-10 where it says "the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating . . . It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you." Ultimately, it is the Spirit speaking in the Scriptures who gives us a better understanding of the ultimate subject matter. We need exegesis, Vanhoozer noted, to help us determine the literal sense of Scripture. Historical context also helps. But we need the overarching historical context and the knowledge that God is the one who is involved to make proper sense of Scripture.

Next, Vanhoozer asked: How do we speak of God? One extreme answer might be that God meant what the author said and no more or less. But the task of interpretation is never exhausted by its original meaning. According to Vanhoozer, we need to read the Scriptures in light of redemptive history and in canonical context. Apollos, who was described by Luke in Acts 18:24 as competent in the Scriptures provides a good example of how exegetes and theologians should relate. Apollos taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, but he only knew the baptism of John. Why did Priscilla have to explain the Word to him more accurately? What did Priscilla and Aquila add? What did Apollos lack? While we cannot say for sure, Vanhoozer used this example to suggest that theologians will want to clarify the grammar of the text since, as Wittgenstein held, essence is expressed by grammar and theology is grammar. Did they give Apollos a crash course in theological grammar? Here we must admit that method only takes us so far. Whatever they told Apollos enabled him to give a thicker description. But from this we learn that we cannot limit grammar to the syntactical; we must be open to the ontological. And that concerns us with what God is actually saying in Scripture.

Vanhoozer concluded by saying that we need to focus on what God was doing in Christ and through creation. This requires collaboration between Scripture scholars and theologians. We need a canonical reading and a grammar of a higher order. Theological interpreters provide streams of living water, while exegetes prepare the way.

"The Sinlessness of Christ"

Katherine Sonderegger, Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Virginia

In her presentation, Sonderegger reflected on two important New Testament passages concerning Christ's sinlessness: Hebrews 4:15b and 2 Corinthians 5:21. They read as follows: "he was tempted in every way as we are, but without sin" and "he became sin for us who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God."

Sonderegger summarized the traditional position offered in the early church fathers, especially Augustine. Unlike our first parents who could either sin or not, Jesus was said to be unable to sin because

the Son could not sin. Christ enters as the new Adam who lives to God. St. Thomas sums this up in his discussion of divine-human perfection in the *Summa*. Thomas's Christology rests on the conformity of redemption to creation. God relates to world in perfect freedom while the cosmos is wholly dependent on God. For Thomas, then, the hypostatic union resulted from a sheer act of grace toward elect. The Word creates through the Spirit and through the Holy Spirit Christ must bear every honor, dignity and perfection that a creature born directly of the Holy Spirit and assumed by the Word could bear. For Thomas, Christ's soul maintains perfect mastery over his body. His body is the perfect instrument of his will. His human intellect is illuminated by the divine light. He is omniscient and has the beatific vision. He is perfectly obedient. His life merits eternal life by obeying God. Christ fulfills the law and in that way his life is a sinless life. Even his body must be perfect.

This leads theology, Sonderegger said, into strange territory. Christ's sinless flesh had no need or capacity for the pathos we sinners undergo as a daily lot. It is *propter nos*, that is, for us that he became representative flesh in a unique fashion. Thomas means that Christ's perfect human flesh exists for one end, that is, to give it for the sins of the world. He was the last Adam. He heals the lost and disobedient creation in fulfilment of his substitutionary office. The Logos permits fleshly temptation, agony and influence so that the Son could be offered for the sins of the world. There is no imitation or pretext in this. There is a vicarious element here. He is for us even to death and in that sense he became sin who knew no sin.

Sonderegger asked: Can this high doctrine of Christ's sinless perfection ward off the suspicion that such a Christ is not truly human. Is he a God in human livery? Is this a form of Docetism? What human life is omniscient, even in torment and death? Do we actually mean that such a one is really the true Adam? Does such a position not preserve the creed at the price of distorting the fact that Christ took upon himself our human nature and truly became one of us? Just how are we to understand Jesus' death cry. Can a perfectly sinless one and omniscient holy Son enter into this final temptation? Could the cries of dereliction belong to the sinless one who goes to Golgotha with full knowledge of the beatific vision? Many modern Christians would say no.

Christ's suffering is the point on which all Christology turns according to Moltmann. His agony brings the injustice and cruelty of the world into the compassion

of God. That is the meaning of his descent into hell. Theologians affirm that his agony in the flesh and his frailty and sorrow are central to the Gospel. The modern temper rejects the medieval view as too domesticating of Christ's passion. Such thinking does not belong in present day Christology. Thomas's view is therefore seen as implausible and objectionable.

For Karl Barth and Edward Irving, we must reject the premise on which earlier Christology was built, namely, the utter impeccability of Christ. He must assume the sinful flesh of the fallen Adam. He must know our condition from the inside as the fellow sufferer and soldier in the besieged city of ours. Irving thinks of Christ's deity as a healing remedy for the flesh he assumes. Barth is much bolder than Irving. For Barth, the Son assumes the fallen flesh of sinners and battles wayward flesh throughout his life. Thus, Barth would reject Irving's anthropological dualism because for Barth sin dwells within and occupies and infects the whole person. Christ is not sinner in some region of his person. He is the great sinner in the Bible. He stands in need. The marks of his prolonged struggle with sin are visible. In the garden of Gethsemane the world waited for the decision of the Son of Man. Would he obey or at last give way to sin and live for self alone? Barth is daring, Sonderegger says. The Father waits for this word. Christ can both obey and disobey. It is possible for Christ to have sinned. Barth affirms Christ's perfect obedience. Christ does not in fact disobey and is sinless. But Sonderegger asks: Has Barth given us enough? Should we agree with Barth? Could Christ have sinned? As a matter of fact he did not disobey. Is this the right idea?

Sonderegger proposes that the premodern doctrine far surpasses modern views of Christ's saving work. It cannot be that our salvation hangs in the balance. Christ is our surety that reflects the direct and unsurpassed strength in the union of the incarnate Word. The personal hypostatic union that took place in him cannot be ruptured. His humanity must be perfectly reconciled to God. Christ cannot sin because the very possibility is the possibility of his human nature going its own way and joining in rebellion against God. That could only mirror the work of Adam and Eve. Our salvation rests on the perfect union of Logos and flesh. Christ must be fully and truly and exquisitely human. He is more vulnerable as he is the perfect embodiment of the Son of God; that is the fullness of humanity. It is his living in perfect obedience. Christ could never sin in the midst of all these passions. He could experience and receive and undergo these torments perfectly and openly. He

suffers so well long ago impassibly, not less but more, as the one who sees and meets sin as it is and conquers it as the one who was betrayed. He conquered it as risen Lord. He is the beloved, sinless bearer of the sins of the whole world.

“The Word Answering the Word: Opening the Space of Catholic Biblical Interpretation”

Lewis Ayres, Durham University, UK

Following the lead of John Webster, Ayres began by noting that Scripture and therefore the canon are a function of the *Deus dixit*. The telos is the reconciliation of all things. While he does not share John Webster’s desire to protest, he does share his love for a theology that is truly theological. As a tribute to John Webster’s work, Ayres proposed to offer a catholic dogmatic space that might help us better negotiate a problem. Modern biblical studies suggest that Trinity and Christology are not necessarily scripturally grounded. But Ayres wants to insist that to offer an account of what Scripture is and how it should be read must begin in trinitarian reflection just because accounts of how Christian thinking proceeds have to be firmly based in talk of how the triune God acts to create, reveal and save. There is a plurality of methods used by Scripture scholars. There are many styles of reading. So, focus on this one central problem could help. We cannot deploy hermeneutical arguments because of textual multivalence. For Christians the problem needs to be approached theologically by asking what is Scripture and how does God use it. Did the Church authorize the canon or did the Church recognize it? Early in church history it was held that you had to do close reading of Scripture to get the sense of its meaning. The unity of the canon is connected with the fulfillment of prophecy in Christ. Reading within the rule of faith therefore took material form. These techniques were foundational. Within Scripture there is an interrelated family of senses. What is literal sense? How does the church’s reading stand in relation to modern historical readings of Scripture?

Ayres proposed to consider the debates of the 1950’s and 1960’s about the relation of Scripture and tradition and the work done before, during and in the five years after the Second Vatican Council as an important period for Catholic theology. Ayres said he would like to focus on Joseph Ratzinger. He then considered an essay Ratzinger contributed to the debate about Trent’s 1546 decree on Scripture and its interpretation. The council stated that this saving truth and moral

discipline are contained in the written books and in the unwritten traditions that came down to us. Could Roman Catholic theologians acknowledge the sufficiency of Scripture? How are Scripture and tradition rooted in God’s revealing? Ratzinger argued that a better understanding of the relation of Scripture and tradition could be achieved only in a better understanding of how both are rooted in God’s act of revealing. In that way he and others were in search of the “literal sense” of Scripture. Scripture witnesses to God who transcends all human witness to him via human language. Revelation transcends the written Scripture as a reality that happens in faith and it witnesses to the importance of the Spirit’s action in reading Scripture. Scripture is the written witness to revelation. The New Testament witnesses to the understanding of the first Christians. The event of Christ is presented, in part, as a freedom enabling the understanding of Scripture. This is exemplified in Paul’s emphasis in 2 Corinthians on the Spirit transforming us and enabling us to see the true meaning of Scripture by removing the veil.

For Christians the Old Testament is seen as pointing to Christ and the living reality of Christ’s body. Acts 15 can be seen as the culmination of a process begun after the resurrection. The council in Jerusalem listens to Paul and Barnabas and James responds quoting Amos 9. With prophecies fulfilled, proclamation now points to Christ’s body and not simply the risen and ascended Christ. This is an ecclesial interpretation in the New Testament, according to Ratzinger, as presented by Ayres. For Ratzinger, an ecclesial theology of the New Testament is called dogmatics. Ayres concluded that we can find things to criticize in Ratzinger’s presentation and that he was not defending him. What he wanted to focus on was the fact that Scripture was constituted by a multilayered process of surprising self-interpretation in light of God’s revelation which was dogmatically crucial to being what it is as Scripture. The church’s subsequent acts then, are demanded by the dynamic Scripture itself lays out. Ratzinger offered a discussion of the Fathers of the church. Since the 16th century this has taken on different significance. The ancient principle that when the Fathers agree on an interpretation, then this must be accepted made its way into the decrees of Trent and Vatican I. That just names a problem and solves nothing because the question of when they all agree still remains. Ratzinger then offers a historical definition. He judges that the period between the end of the first century and the rise of Islam could be considered an age of the Fathers in a special way such that the Fathers belong together as do word and answer, accentuating the priority of the word.

Ratzinger further claimed that the word would cease to exist without the speaker or the hearer. The word finds an answering word because that is how God's word works among us. The answer that the Son and Spirit help us make is a knowing in faith. This is a circular position. But it is not a vicious circle because we can only know this from its appearing. Both of Ratzinger's essays root Scripture and tradition in the words given to us. The word brings about its own answer as the Church is drawn toward understanding how it must read Scripture.

Ayres argued that complexities must be noted. De Lubac asked if there could be an allegorical reading. No, he said, since there is no other Christ that needs to be read behind the New Testament inasmuch as the New Testament is the allegory of the Old Testament. That is the mystery of God's redemptive Word incarnate in Christ. The New Testament contains the fruitfulness of this mystery. The mystery of Christ in the New Testament spreads forth the mystery before all. De Lubac offers his account of the "literal meaning." But, like Ratzinger, he is not always consistent. There is a contested set of readings. There is a field of readings to be engaged in awareness of differing philosophical presuppositions. There is no one reading that is a simply ecclesial reading of a text although fixed points such as the creed and magisterial statements help. Such statements shape our reading of texts. We have to take into account Church reflection asking, for instance what it means to say the Father and Son are in one another. There is a mysterious process to how Christ speaks through the texts. Historical critical and ecclesial readings overlap since there is a history of reception of texts. Concerns should be rooted in a doctrine of Scripture by focusing on the question of who speaks and what is spoken. Scripture is meant to be read through the Spirit. In this light there is a family of readings that is the "literal meaning." This view follows not only on literary-theoretical grounds, but from a theological and historical awareness that the Word and Spirit constitute Scripture for us as something subject to a cumulative and gradual interpretation.

“Does Historical Criticism Exist? A Contribution to Debate on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture”

Francis Watson, Durham University, UK

Does historical criticism exist?

Engaging with texts, Christians try to talk about God in an orderly way. Recent work is marked by core concerns with Scripture as privileged testimony to the being and act of the triune God. There is considerable diversity in the ways these come to expression. The issue Watson focuses on is that biblical scholarship is usually labelled historical criticism. Few doubt this. Watson wants to detach this label from interpretative practice because it is misleading. Watson wants to challenge the view that historical criticism equals proper Scriptural interpretation. He believes that the relation of theology and Scripture will be seen in a new perspective when this equation is not made. Theological concerns are evident in relation to reading Scripture. Insofar as historical criticism wants to leave theology aside, then, according to Watson, it is not helpful.

Historical criticism is as old as the Bible itself. Certain texts are so significant that no effort to grasp them should be spared. Augustine deals with scholarly procedures regarding Scriptural interpretation. For Augustine, Scripture should be studied in their original languages. The tools of Scriptural interpretation are used to further the ends of love of God and neighbor. Augustine considered the Synoptic Gospels and his solution to the Synoptic problem has defenders to this day. But he did not realize that Mark was dependent on Peter. Our scholarship is modern, while theirs was pre-modern. Our scholarship is critical, while theirs was pre-critical. Our scholarship focuses mainly on historical reconstruction, while theirs is geared towards the confirmation of dogma. While our scholarship is non-confessional, theirs found its home in the Church and within the bounds of competing orthodoxies. We practice historical criticism and they did not. Watson thinks there is strong continuity in Scripture scholarship rather than these discontinuities. He believes there is great exegetical basis for the doctrine of the Trinity while a strictly historical critical emphasis will not deal with this important issue. Watson believes we need to rethink history and exegesis.

History is important. Scriptural exegetes are concerned with interpretation of texts. All texts come from a certain context. This is the work of an exegete not a historian. Historical criticism says interpreting a text in context alienates reader. But, according to Watson, it has the opposite effect. Scripture interpretation operates in dialect between distance and proximity. The text becomes vividly and pointedly alive. According to historical criticism, there is a limited agenda of issues and one works through the protocols of an agenda. But a text can have as many historical contexts as interpreters. So we cannot

restrict context to what precedes the text! Historical criticism then is a misnomer since modern Scripture study is informed by history but not only by that.

Watson observed that historical criticism had its basis in textual criticism with the aim of restoring manuscripts to their original status and purging them of later corruptions. More recently, critical scholarship has come to mean criticizing received opinions about biblical texts such that everything now must be tested and a great deal must then be rejected. Watson pointed out that a willingness to reject comes to be embraced as a hallmark of this new critical spirit. The more one rejects, the more critical that scholar is thought to be. Watson mentioned Reimarus, Strauss and even Schweitzer as benchmarks in this regard. This kind of criticism became exclusively historical and critical from that perspective.

Watson noted that Reimarus owed his twentieth-century reputation to Albert Schweitzer who placed him at the beginning of the life of Jesus movement. He was German. He claimed Jesus saw himself as a militant Son of David messiah. He was also highly critical of Christian doctrines such as the Trinity and the resurrection. Schweitzer was, above all, critical. For these scholars, the life of Jesus was the main concern. In 1699 the history of Christ was presented as assembled from the four gospels and Reimarus's deistic gospel criticism was a minor factor.

Watson concluded by asking whether or not such historical criticism exists as anything other than something used for ideological purposes. When that is the case, he argued, then it is entirely misleading and we should stop using it. Watson thinks we would be better off to just talk of biblical interpretation. Historical criticism is a defunct terminology and it will not be missed if we consider it to be defunct. Augustine rightly argued that an interpretation of Scripture should point us to the love of God and neighbor.

Following these presentations **Darren Sarisky** read **John Webster's** appreciative response to all of these presentations and to his students who helped bring to publication the wonderful edited volume of essays entitled: *Theological Theology: Essays in Honour of John Webster*, ed. R. David Nelson, Darren Sarisky and Justin Stratis (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2015) and presented to John Webster on the occasion of the 60th birthday. This is a book that all readers of this Newsletter would find most interesting. And it is to be noted that each of the presentations summarized

above can be read in its entirety in that important volume. In addition, readers will find another nineteen interesting and challenging essays.

Book Review

Knowing God By Name: A Conversation Between Elizabeth A. Johnson and Karl Barth. By Cherith Fee Nordling. New York: Peter Lang, 2010. Pp. vii-291. \$48.95 (paper). ISBN 978-0-8204-7863-0.

By Katherine Sonderegger
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In human affairs, some conversations stumble. They may be necessary; perhaps inevitable; they may even be welcomed; yet stumble they do, all the same. The conversation between Karl Barth and feminism is one such necessary but awkward exchange. It does not take long for the feminist, poring over the pages of the *Church Dogmatics* to find passages that make a strained conversation fall altogether silent. The famed and over-discussed sections on men and women as ordered pairs, something like the letters "a" and "b" in the Roman alphabet, have stilled many feminist exchanges with Barth in the very starting-blocks. Wonderfully, Nordling, in this careful and carefully researched work on Barth and feminism gives this neuralgic section in Barth a wide berth.

In *Knowing God by Name*, Nordling instead aims to bring Barth and Johnson into a different and more spacious room for conversation: the starting-point and method of dogmatics. Nordling takes Barth's dogmatic method to be at heart liberative: the insistence on hearing Christ's voice alone frees the creature from the oppressive rivals of state and culture. This is a reading of Barth as dogmatician rooted in the Barmen Declaration and Barth's vigorous rejection, throughout the 1930's, of all Natural Theology. (Surprisingly, in light of this interwar focus, Nordling does not make much of Barth's principled opposition to the Orders of Creation—another liberative element in Barth's method.) Nordling's fundamental instincts as a theologian lie with Barth. She takes it as given that opposition to Natural Theology—at least as Barth

defined it in those years—will champion proper human freedom and right relation.

Nordling considers Barth a natural conversation partner for theological feminists, for both, she argues, insist on the full-throated dignity and freedom of the creature before God. Elizabeth Johnson, the author of the classic, *She Who Is* serves as feminist interlocutor. Nordling's theological commitments align Johnson parallel to Barth as a theologian of freedom, but cross-grained against him as a theologian of women's experience. The broad aim of the volume is to demonstrate that feminist aims are in truth undermined by the very method Johnson has chosen to instill them.

So, we might say, the awkwardness between Barth and feminism remains. In the end, Nordling's work forces us to ponder whether there be sufficient common ground for *conversation*, genuine *dialogue* to break out in this room where sit these two theologians; or do we have here another version of Barth's famous characterization of his encounter with Emil Brunner—an impossible meeting between an elephant and a whale?

Such questions are worth lingering over in a project like Nordling's, for Barth long lionized conversation, *das Gespräch*; it found its way into several volume titles of the *Gesammtausgabe* and formed a central analytic category in Barth's *Doctrine of the Human Person*, and the *Analogia Relationis*, Barth's *Doctrine of the Imago Dei*. Barth championed the "open hearted" dialogue with the neighbor, and drew on the "living exchange," the *Sprechdenken* favored by German phenomenologists, Rosenzweig and Buber. It seems that Barth would be the ideal candidate to invite to the Councils of Vatican II (he was invited); the ideal candidate for ecumenical parleys; the ideal candidate for exchange between feminism and Christian theological method. But in truth, Barth left behind a painful legacy of conversations failed, closed off, misbegotten. Indeed, a comparison of Barth's dogmatic theology with the thought-worlds and convictions of others is a strait gate, and few can enter.

Some examples of broken conversations from *Knowing God by Name*: Nordling presses upon Johnson the Barthian worry over Feuerbach and the self-absolutizing of human ideals. How, she asks, can Johnson's method ward off the suspicion that God is very much as we desire Her, an *Aberglaube* of feminist consciousness? (Chapters 4 and 8) These are important questions, and lie behind much deep probing about Doctrines of Social Trinity. But

Johnson inhabits the world Karl Rahner built, and the deep legacy of the supernatural existential and the graced world of deLubac's *Supernatural* are its building blocks. Rahner wore a distinctive style of Thomism and Augustinianism, and he most certainly attracted theological opponents over the years leading up to and away from Vatican II. It rehearses this on-going conflict within the Catholic world to cite these opponents against Rahner, and in this way, Johnson; but it does not deepen conversation, I say. (Chapter 7) At stake is the starting-point in theology and the antecedent world that those starting points bring in their train. Exchanges at this level most often result in mutual question begging over first principles.

Or we might consider Johnson's claim to "play with models" for Divine Naming, refusing to offer a single or binding metaphysical vocabulary. Johnson simply does not agree with Barth in his robust claims for revelation, nor does the tradition of magisterial teaching on these matters govern Johnson as it does a dogmatician such as Barth, or indeed, Rahner. (Chapter 3) Standing where Barth does, Johnson is inconsistent, perhaps even self-contradictory. But that is Johnson's own standpoint: this is theological *bricolage* grounded in a high doctrine of Divine Mystery and human apophysis.

Or finally, take the vexed matter of essentialism in feminist properties and experience. (Chapter 8 and Conclusion) Nordling finds Johnson absolutizing and in this way totalizing in her assumptions about feminist experience. There is an important question here too about "difference" and the "performative" nature of gender. But it is simply to endorse Barth to say that the Augustinian "descent into the self" cannot give real knowledge of God; indeed in the end leads only to distorted and titanizing visions of the self. Deeper, more fruitful conversation emerges, I believe, from an imaginative entering into the presuppositions and thought worlds of one's vis-à-vis: to affirm what is right, what is challenging, what is instructive about one's dialog partner leads to richer insights, and more vivid disagreements. Recent work on Barth and Thomas, or Barth and Rahner would recommend themselves here.

Knowing God by Name is a work of careful and thorough scholarship by a theologian who takes both Barth and feminism seriously. We can only applaud a scholar who brings to the fore these two revolutions in Christian theology. But Elizabeth Johnson is a revolutionary too, in her own idiom and style. I believe more conversation can be had between these liberative theologians, and I hope Cherith Nordling will be the one to do so.

Response to Katherine Sonderegger

By Cherith Fee Nordling

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Lombard, Illinois

I thank Katherine Sonderegger for her review of *Knowing God by Name*. In so doing, she speaks to the possibility, and posture, of meaningful theological discourse in Christian community, particularly between such different conversation partners as Elizabeth Johnson and Karl Barth. I am grateful for the opportunity to reply, hoping to honor and invigorate this potentially flagging conversation.

Some conversations are non-starters due to lack of meaningful engagement with the theological claims, presuppositions, and starting points of one's dialogue partner. Sonderegger ponders whether a conversation between Barth and Catholic (particularly feminist) theology has hope, or scope, beyond the impasse of their different starting points and Barth's "painful legacy of conversations failed, closed off, misbegotten." This appears to be due to the intransigence of Barth's theological perspective grounded in the Incarnate Christ, which makes him a difficult conversation partner for those who attempt to ground Christian discourse elsewhere, particularly the agnostic, pluralist, and relativist foundations Johnson espouses more openly with each new publication. In short, her review focuses on whether there is ground here for the kind of necessary conversation attempted in this book.

Sonderegger reminds us that deeper and more fruitful conversation occurs when one enters imaginatively "into the presuppositions and thought worlds of one's vis-à-vis; to affirm what is right, what is challenging, what is instructive about one's dialog partner," making both insights and disagreements richer and more vivid. That Sonderegger does not recognize *Knowing God by Name* as one such conversation is perplexing. I sought to highlight and value the insights and vivid disagreements between these two theologians and some of their contemporaries, immersing the reader to some degree into their presuppositions and thought worlds, to learn precisely by bringing their theological starting points and the theological conclusions that follow to light with a view toward understanding the proper basis for theological knowledge of the triune God. While most theologians agree that the starting point should be God's economic trinitarian self-revelation, not everyone actually allows that revelation, in its identity

with Jesus Christ and the outpouring of his Holy Spirit to shape both their method and their conclusions. That was the problem I sought to address in this book, which simply cannot be brushed aside with claims that Barth simply had one position and Johnson another.

Certainly, Barth is a difficult conversation partner for someone like Johnson who openly claims that her starting point for naming God is women's experience of themselves. Yet, based on Sonderegger's description of fruitful conversation, I am surprised that Sonderegger posts a large "danger" sign over Barth. How else can we discover what is right, challenging, or instructive about Barth as a dialogue partner, unless we are open to the possibility that this might involve vivid disagreement as well as deep insight?

Even more curiously, Sonderegger does not place Johnson under the same scrutiny, allowing for charitable insight and clarifying disagreement. Johnson's theological intransigence, her disengaged dismissal of those in and outside her tradition whose Christian starting point she deems more exclusive than her own (one that repeatedly attenuates difference on the procrustean bed of inclusiveness), is not held to the same criteria. Nor does she explain why Johnson's thought world, theology, and methods are exempt from fruitful engagement by someone holding a different theological perspective than her own. To exempt her from robust scrutiny vis-à-vis the theological worlds that do not share her "standpoint"—whom she happily challenges—seems protective and even disrespectful of Johnson.

"At stake is the starting point in theology and the antecedent world that those starting points bring in their train" writes Sonderegger. Precisely. Starting points matter profoundly. Where one starts theologically determines where one ends up. From Sonderegger's point of view, a conversation between Barth and Johnson is a non-starter. Johnson's issue was with the viability of Barth's starting point in contrast to her own. In a brief dismissal of Barth published thirty years ago (*The Legitimacy of the God Question: Pannenberg's New Anthropology*, *Irish Theological Quarterly* 52 (1986): 289-303), based on an unsubstantiated description and judgment of the viability of his theological method and claims, Johnson specifically described her own theological intent as an effort to *move beyond Barth*. Since it hardly seems possible, or meaningful, to move beyond Barth without having engaged him at the center of his theological concerns, in some small measure this book provides that engagement, in an attempt to draw out a conversation Johnson never seems to have had with Barth's theology.

Johnson starts with the female subject, placing her at the center of what Johnson calls the historical juncture between traditional Christian thought and the *a priori* of human experience. Then she reconstructs trinitarian doctrine, Christology, and God-talk in ontological terms. Using women's relational experience as the starting point, she develops a theology of God as necessarily and mutually related to and conditioned by the world. All the while, Johnson recognizes that God's distinction from the world is a priority in Christian tradition. This is the real issue that confronts theologians who claim to know the triune God in faith. Can theologians genuinely see the union and distinction of divine and human being and action as actualized in Christ and understood through his Spirit if they implicitly or explicitly allow human experience to be normative for theological description by making it their starting point.

Hoping, therefore, that her theological project which culminated in *She Who Is* would remain recognizable within the "contours" of Christian faith, Johnson incorporates multiple, mutually exclusive metaphysical systems into a totalizing, relational ontology that is fraught with admitted instability. Johnson makes her feminist offering at a time when she considers "the very viability of the Christian tradition for present and coming generations" to be at stake. With the stakes this high, it seemed appropriate to test her feminist proposal for its viability and sustainability for Christian doctrine and Church renewal. In *Knowing God by Name*, I focus on Johnson's feminist methodology, transcendental anthropology, epistemology and panentheistic relational ontology, regarding their viability for trinitarian theology and Christology. Finally, a sustained critique of Johnson's God-talk is made within the context of wider Thomistic scholarship and modern feminism.

Can Johnson's methodological, philosophical principles and presuppositions make possible what she assumes is not otherwise theologically possible? Are they internally consistent, inherently plausible, and compatible within the contours of her Roman Catholic tradition? What are her Christian contours, and how are they determined? Do they remain within the contours of the Christian faith that begin and end with the Triune *Alpha* and *Omega* made known in Jesus Christ? And what effect do Johnson's metaphysical principles have on the divine-human distinction and freedom that she believes is fundamental to Christian faith and God-talk?

These questions are theological, methodological, epistemological, and ethical. Johnson tries to reconstruct Christian doctrine while remaining within

Christianity's contours, and to move beyond the theological affirmations and concerns Barth raises regarding the human capacity to know and name God apart from God in Jesus Christ. I sought to bring Barth and Johnson's concerns into dialogue at precisely this point. Johnson does not have to make sense to, or make her case before, Barth. It is not from Barth's perspective that she is inconsistent and self-contradictory, making mutually exclusive claims with equal fervor and no accountability. Barth serves as interlocutor for a number of reasons, including his initial sharing of some of Johnson's own presuppositions early in his life and then encountering the living God on God's Self-giving terms. In a sense Barth can imaginatively enter Johnson's thought world and engage her vis-à-vis. Johnson's position contra Barth, however, keeps her from engaging him to see what he sees. Without the advantage of standing vis-à-vis, her theological commitments feel the weight that the powerful emphases Barth's affirmations bring to bear on her project; while keeping her from seeing the problems she reintroduces in the church (with which he was deeply familiar) that fail to offer an inclusive, liberative way forward.

Johnson systematically re-schematizes those aspects of Christian doctrine that she believes maintain too radical a distinction between God, human beings, and creation. Precisely for this reason, Johnson denounced Barth's trinitarian theology and corresponding God-talk based on the "radical dissociation it presupposed between God and human experience." In the article cited above, Johnson stated that because Barth was not willing to ground such knowledge within human experience, he did not take human experience of the divine seriously. Citing Pannenberg, she dismissed him as having retreated from "engagement with contemporary criteria for the truth of assertions about God" into his own "supranaturalistic wildlife sanctuary," leaving his God-talk in the "self-inflicting isolation of a higher glossolalia."

To argue that Barth does not take human experience seriously in relation to God, however, is again to fail to engage him vis-à-vis. With Johnson, Barth unequivocally affirms that God is and can only be made known in human experience. It is only in the context of personal human experience—objective, rational, personal, active and wholly relational—that we come to know God and ourselves. The question is not whether or not God is experienced or whether such character involves human self-determination; rather, it is what constitutes and conditions that experience? Where Barth differs from her is in his understanding of who and what makes that experiential knowledge possible and actual. Barth

contends that God alone can do this, and that God does so in the triune self-revelation of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ. God's public, universal *euangelion* is located in his self-referential Word, made objective, rational, specific and all-encompassing. Within this context, that was the question asked in my book: can any theology escape the danger of engaging in self-talk when starting with self-experience instead of exclusively with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ? Thus, my question to Sonderegger is: why would she marginalize my judgment that "descent into self," is not a proper way to understand the triune God by saying that this is simply "to endorse Barth"? Actually, that assertion followed my attempt to think about the way things truly are as disclosed in revelation. Jesus Christ objectively thematizes the form and content of God's revelation. As the Incarnate Son, this Word is truly unique and differs from any other spoken to or by humanity, since its origin is not in created reality but derives from the Triune being of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Scripture and Christian tradition uniquely thematize this experiential knowledge in God-talk based on God's gracious self-revelation. This Word is not a concept of divinity in abstraction or a generalized word about humanity in relation to divine being. Rather, this Word reveals in his own human-divine experience the God who grounds, constitutes and maintains all existence, particularly that of the Church.

Theology is to speak of the Church's experience of God as those who live in embodied response to the living Word. Trinitarian doctrine and worship is the expression of the life of the Christian community in ontological participation with the triune God. It is not, therefore, language or truth accessible to those who do not indwell it. Rather, we come to understand the truth as we indwell it, conformed to the gospel narrative and to Jesus Christ as its center, by our shared life in the Spirit who is God present to and with us.

Christianity upholds the essential importance of distinction and difference between God and human beings at every level. Nowhere is this more dramatically realized than in the Incarnation. Jesus is uniquely different from us—"the supreme particularity of this true man [who] is primarily and at the same time the true God Himself," says Barth—and yet only in him do we know proper divine-human relation in distinction, without confusion or commingling. In Jesus Christ and the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit, God creates the possibility and actuality of our being joined in *koinonia* to the *perichoretic* union that pertains only

to the Trinity and the hypostatic union who is Jesus of Nazareth—mutual indwelling without loss of distinction. The mysterious *fact* of the *homoousion* makes impossible any generalized concepts of divine-human relationality abstracted from him. In him, the union between Creator and creature is permanently guaranteed precisely as the distinction of each is gloriously maintained in freedom, integrity and love.

Recognizing the *homoousion* prevents the collapse of the God-world distinction inherent in Johnson's collapse of the immanent into the economic Trinity and the Spirit of God into human self-transcendence. If God is in Jesus Christ what he is in himself, then, Barth reasons, any attempt to say otherwise, particularly on the basis of agnosticism, would be to succumb to subjectivism, dualism, pantheism, or, what ironically was for him the worst of all, panentheism, which compromises divine and creaturely integrity, no matter how one uses that "en" to try to maintain distinction. The controlling concept makes God utterly dependent on creation for the expression of his own Being and action.

In Johnson's assessment, Barth and the historical Christian community are outside the scope of contemporary God-talk, by having grounded Christian faith "on pure decision in response to an announced authority without any appeal to reason or objectivity," which would include for her the objective historical reality of the Incarnate Son. Barth's appeal to the authority of God's self-revealing Word "*must be left behind* if such speech is not to be dismissed as the arbitrary expression of a pious heart."

Determined to do just that, she "goes beyond" Barth's view of trinitarian revelation into what she considers the more accessible realm of contemporary experience and agnostic "openness." Here, holy mystery and self-experience are the perpetually concomitant history of our own concept of God; thus neither can ever be concluded. As the term of our transcendent self-experience, infinitely incomprehensible divine mystery is not limited to any particular revelation or naming, including the Christian confession of God as triune. "All of our thinking moves from the world to God, and can never move in the opposite direction," argues Johnson, especially in regard to the Trinity and Jesus Christ. Any exclusively Christian trinitarian confession improperly limits and "idolatrously" thematizes divine mystery.

The particularity of the Christian narrative does not rest in the event of Jesus Christ for Johnson. It must always be sustained by a prior, unthematic, tran-

scendental “relatedness to the incomprehensible Infinite,” or prelinguistic, unthematized experience of divine mystery that precedes all thematizing. It remains the same no matter who experiences it or how it is named. Nevertheless, she ultimately contends that properly thematized God-talk derives from female experience, which has priority over (1) all unthematized experience, (2) all thematized experience, and (3) all divine and created *being*.

Through her inverse conceptual hierarchy, Johnson dominates divine being through her cognitive demands—a privilege, however, that she must theoretically extend to every transcendent thinking subject. She cannot, however, given her asymmetrical commitment to women’s experience that undermines cherished inclusivity and dominates open-ended God-talk. This inconsistency and self-contradiction is not seen by standing where Barth does, as Sonderegger suggests. It comes from standing with Johnson, who acknowledges for more reasons than these that her project is “fraught with complexity.”

Johnson’s panentheistic ontology and transcendental anthropology essentially eliminate the need for any direct reference to Jesus Christ as Incarnate Savior and Lord. Having dismissed the Biblical and creedal tradition for colluding in a “false uniformity” that views Jesus as the Son of God in a divine, transcendent sense, Johnson rejects the traditional understanding of Jesus as *homoousion* with the Father while retaining a sense of the historical Jesus as *homoousion* with humanity. Utilizing the modernist Jesus/Christ dichotomy that theoretically splits the single subject of the Christian narrative, Jesus Christ, into two entities—Jesus of Nazareth and “Christic reality”—she thereby claims to see more, and better, than Christian history. “Christian identity as life in Christ,” she contends, “*cannot* be restricted to the historical person Jesus” (“Mary and Contemporary Christology,” 163). If we cannot say that the “Christ idea” is more than Jesus Christ, then we deny the witness of the New Testament, she argues. Salvation is not uniquely configured to and through Jesus Christ; rather, it is something uniquely experienced *by* him.

For Johnson, the cross and resurrection may be part of Jesus’ actualized salvific history, but they are extraneous to our salvation. The decisive locus of salvation is not in Jesus Christ, crucified, resurrected, and ascended, but in what takes place in us or among us here and now. The possibility and actuality of our salvation are located in our present existence as “Spirit-phenomena.” In her final estimation, we do not hope in the Word made flesh. He is not God, He is not

a unique word, or an unrepeatable event in history. We do not hope *en Christo*; we merely hope that Jesus’ *experience* of openness to Spirit-Sophia connects to our experience as “Spirit in the world.”

To speak of the triune God made known in Jesus Christ, however, is to speak a particular, non-negotiable reality whose identity is not up for reconfiguration in the hands of any creature. This is not *Gespräch* for its own sake, or even *Sprechdenken* for the sake of hospitable Christian community. Hospitably, charitably, and fearlessly offered, this discourse is the Church’s living and spoken witness to the triune God made known in Israel’s history and ultimately in the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth, the Incarnate Son of God and of Mary. The gospel opened up by this triune *koinonia*, which the Church inhabits and in which it participates through Jesus by the Spirit, orders the Church’s speech in relational response to Jesus Christ.

Johnson continues to be challenged to speak analogically about “the way things truly are” in relation to God and everything else by speaking theologically out of the Church’s union with Christ, rather than anthropologically from the individual or collective self. As she exchanges the language of the Church in regard to the triune God and its life in God for an over-arching, ontological description of relational being, she removes herself from the only discourse that gives this language meaning. In the end, her God-talk is essentially privatized, and not only fruitless as conversation, but meaningless as theological discourse within the Christian community.

Among those who recognize this most clearly is post-Christian feminist Daphne Hampson. She observes that reformist feminism like Johnson’s involves changing meaning as well as praxis, thus breaking continuity with historical Christian tradition and communities. Hampson contends that when feminists such as Johnson change Christian doctrine, particularly the Incarnation and the Trinity, their theologies no longer have to do with Christianity. She challenges them to acknowledge as much and to have the requisite courage to do more authentic theology without pretense.

Precisely because Christianity is the supremely historical confession of God Incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, son of Mary and of God, argues Hampson, “to be a Christian is not simply to preach Jesus’ message. It is also to proclaim a message about Jesus”—particularly regarding his divine-human

resurrected reality—"and therein for a feminist lie all the problems." Having stood vis-à-vis both historical Christianity and Johnson's reformist feminism as a post-Christian feminist, Hampson argues that enterprises like Johnson's have lost their moorings and nerve as fruitful Christian discourse, becoming instead a profoundly secular enterprise. As she states in *Theology and Feminism*, "[W]hat seems to have replaced talk of God is largely talk of women's experience . . . what I miss is 'theology.'"

Theology allows us, as those joined to Jesus Christ by the Spirit, to ask every question through the decisive event of his divine-human being. Everything we understand about being a human being in relation to God, to others and to all creation has been reoriented to and through him. Christian discourse starts with Jesus Christ as the focal point out of which to ask about the Creator-creature distinction, about love in freedom, about personhood, human and triune, and about a lived correspondence to this reality. In him, we have been invited into an everlasting conversation infused by the very life, power, and fruit-filled character of God. This is fruitful conversation indeed.

Food for Thought

In a meeting of the "English Colloquium" with his students at the Bruderholz Restaurant in Basel on November 25, 1958, Barth opened his discussion concerning knowledge of God in *CD II/1* as follows: "Man's knowledge before God is the *de facto* starting point for our discussion here. But [we should understand] that this has been first preceded by the act of God in his sovereignty (and not by an act of man, as the old Liberalism could say).

Ritschl and I are both non-speculative but operate with the presupposition that knowledge is of God and God's knowability is itself a gift factor. The old Liberalism, by contrast, operated by an analysis of human experience. But here that is preceded by an act of God, as Sovereign. (At this point there would be occasion for [our critical] discussion of Schleiermacher.)

But to what extent is God knowable and to what extent is he really known? The knowledge of God in the Church is invulnerable to exterior attack. Where God is truly known, he is [in himself] knowable. Asking the question of the possibility of such knowledge presupposes God's *knowability* as its object.

We are never free here simply to choose one entity from a series . . . the holy God is not delimited or subsumed under any of our conceptual categories. This means our thought regarding 'attributes' (or

better, 'perfections') of God is not to be funded somehow by our experience of ourselves or of the larger world (neither through positive analogy, nor by *via negativa* contrast) . . . For this knowledge is bound to its object in a peculiar way [that is, by revelation which means it must start with God's own action in faith as mediated knowledge of God's primary objectivity] . . . The objectivity in which God is object to himself has primacy . . . we are given a secondary objectivity, [whereby] God is indirectly objective to us—a mediated objectivity," Raymond Kemp Anderson with a Foreword by John Hesselink, *Karl Barth's Table Talk: Transcripts of Barth's Conversations with His Students at the Bruderholz Restaurant in Basel During the Years 1958-1964* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2014), 9-11. Thanks to John Hesselink for providing a copy of this book to the Editor.

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